Dexterity

"Getting your fingers to do what you want them to do..."

According to Webster's dictionary, dexterity is, "the readiness and grace in physical activity; especially the skill and ease in using the hands". Well that obviously applies to us guitar players; the more you do a particular exercise or movement, the better you become.

In fact, our brains are designed in such a way that it's impossible for you to not get better when you practice. That means that any amount of playing on the guitar whatsoever is beneficial. Now when we practice specifically, deliberately and with repetition, we end up gaining a lot of control over our fingers - or anything else that we set our mind to, for that matter.

Since our thumb is located so closely to our first and second fingers, our third and fourth fingers don't get called on for the same amount of tasks throughout the day.

For this reason, EVERYONE'S third and fourth fingers tend to be lazy when playing guitar. You thought it was just you? Nope! Hendrix, Van Halen, Vai and any other player that you can think of, had to develop their third and fourth fingers with exercises, many times, these exact same exercises. The only guitar players that don't have this issue are those that are born with a thumb that grows straight from the middle of their hand. :)

Yes, I'm toying with you!! Everyone has this issue, *so let's find out how to undo it!*

The following three exercises were specifically designed to strengthen your fingers and hands, increase your speed and sharpen your technique. I have used these exercises for years and have found them to be extremely beneficial.

Exercise one is a warm-up just to get your fingers moving.

Exercise two is an intense workout that develops both left and right hands. You will especially feel the third and fourth finger of your fretting hand being worked out through this one. Make sure that you're using the appropriate finger on the appropriate fret throughout the exercise. For instance, when you start playing frets two and three, make sure you are using fingers two and three. When you're playing frets three and four, make sure you are playing with fingers three and four.

Exercise three is a unique exercise that will seriously challenge you and require you to play on your fingertips. Don't be concerned if you can't do this exercise right away. It's definitely one you want to work up to doing. This third exercise can be fingerpicked or sweep picked. If you are going to use a guitar pick to do the sweep pick, pick the first three notes down and the second

three notes up. Also make sure that when you do pick each string, it's done in a sweeping motion - NOT picking each note individually. It should be a smooth motion, allowing the pick to do the work. If you still have questions after reading this, please see the associated videos.

At the bottom of these dexterity exercises, you will see I also cover four things that you always want to remember when playing these exercises. Let me give you a little bit of theory as to why we are doing each of these things.

1. **Playing on your fingertips makes a guitar player faster and more efficient.** The more you play on your fingertips the lighter your touch will be and the less hand fatigue you will experience. It's very important to also have control over what part of the finger you use. Since the fingertips seemed to be the hardest part to master, learning this first will make everything else seem easier. Guitar players that play on their fingertips tend to play chords cleanly. Guitar players that play on the pads of their fingers tend to play chords sloppily.

2. **Playing right behind the fret requires much less pressure than playing further back.** Think about the leverage of a seesaw. The position of the fulcrum - that part under the center of the seesaw that balances it – determines how much leverage you have. On a see-saw, if the fulcrum is in the correct place, a small child can easily lift a large man off the ground. Similarly, leveraging your finger closer to the fret will allow you to play more quickly and efficiently.

3. **Playing with all your fingers is very important because, as you become a more accomplished guitar player, you will most likely be playing faster and/or more complex arrangements.** Running out of fingers is no fun! So be proactive and use that third and fourth finger. I have had many students over the years thank me for insisting that they use their third and fourth fingers.

4. **Lastly, it's helpful to leave some space between the palm of your fretting hand and the guitar neck because it allows you to more easily play on your fingertips and ultimately have more control of your hand.** At first, this can be a little awkward. Most beginners grab the guitar neck like a shovel and their thumb comes right over the neck. And that's perfect… if you are digging a hole with your guitar! But you're not...so don't!

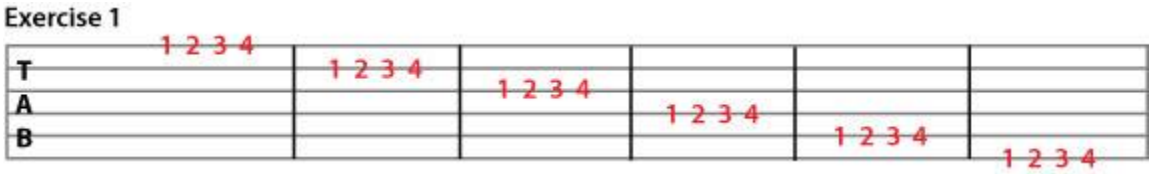
What we do on the guitar requires a lot more finesse and a much different approach than digging a hole. If we have a guitar strap holding up our guitar or if our guitar is being cradled by our legs and/or arms, then the guitar is not going anywhere. Once you are truly aware of this, it will liberate your hand from grappling the neck.

For new guitar players, grappling the neck can really limit your playing. Later on in your playing you may be able to be more carefree, but for now try to stick to good technique.

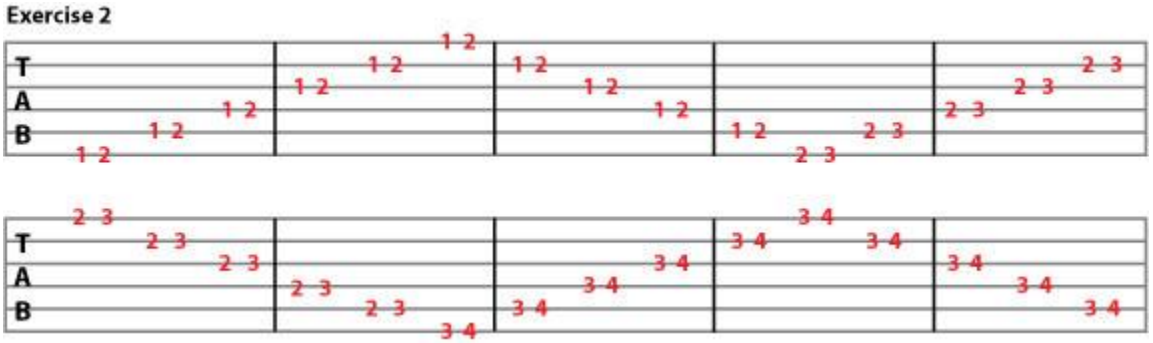
I am often times asked, "*How long should I practice this exercise?*" To which, I pose this question, "*how good do you want to get?*" Obviously, the more you practice these exercises, the better you'll become. If you want to become fast, you should practice it a lot. If you are perfectly fine with mediocrity, then you don't have to play as much. Alright, enough talk! Off you go!!!

- Play directly on your fingertips - make sure nails on "fret" hand are always trimmed.
- Play right behind the fret (this is for leverage). Remember the see-saw example.
- Play with ALL your fingers (each finger plays a specific fret)
- It is best to leave some space between the palm of your hand and the guitar neck. This will give you much needed leverage to play on your fingertips. Curling the last knuckle on your fingers is also helpful.

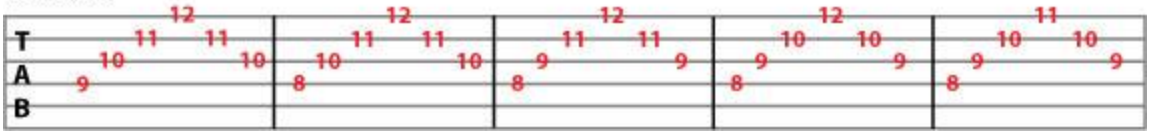
Dexterity exercise #1 is a GREAT exercise for beginners to advanced players. You can practice it for long periods of time and is great for general agility and strength.



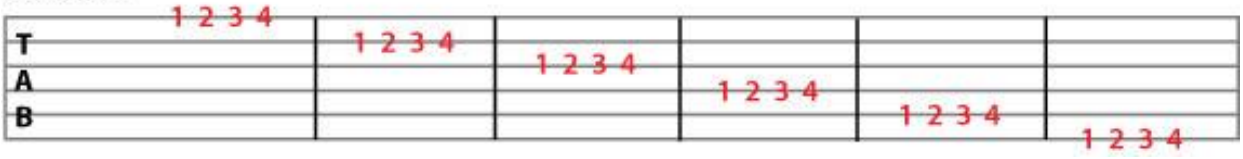
Dexterity exercise #2 is designed for intermediate to advanced players and is a great agility and strength builder. You will especially feel a "burn" when using fingers 3 and 4. This will quickly get your 3rd and 4th finger to be as nimble as fingers 1 and 2.



Dexterity exercise #3 is for ADVANCED players! It is a MAJOR strength builder and perfect for building chordal dexterity, stretch (reach) and strength. Take your time moving into this exercise. It's very challenging!

Exercise 3

Depending on where you are at in your playing, these different exercises will serve you in various ways. The more you do them, the more dexterous you will become. Bottom-line, more practice = better player, 100% of the time

Alternate Picking Exercises using Exercise 1

Exercise 1

For some extra-special-bonus-points type practice, try using the following variations on the "1,2,3,4" picking exercise (use alternate - up/down - picking)

1234	2134	3124	4123
1243	2143	3142	4132
1324	2314	3214	4213
1342	2341	3241	4231
1423	2413	3412	4312
1432	2431	3421	4321